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ABSTRACT

A Colorado elementary school has developed reading units for the intermediate grades using novels written for children. Classes range from those in which one novel is taught per year to those in which novels form the entire reading program. These novel presentations are guided experiences, much the same as developmental reading lessons in most basal series. Specifically, teachers build background for each chapter, introduce new vocabulary that students will be unable to decode using context, give a reason for reading, and assign the chapter to be read silently. Following silent reading, teachers discuss the chapter orally, or assign the students higher level comprehension questions to be answered on paper. Most often, these questions are designed using Bloom's Taxonomy, and are of an inferential rather than a literal level of interpretation. Reading skill work, such as vocabulary development and decoding skills, appreciation of style, technique, and plot development can be addressed using the novels, while the language usage skills of the basal materials can be addressed during a separate language period so they do not detract from the reading time. The possibilities for interdisciplinary activities, such as tracing a voyage or studying the locale of a particular story, are limitless. Students can also compose their own study questions using Bloom's Taxonomy. (Chapter questions for a suggested novel and a list of appropriate titles and their recommended readability levels are included.) (HTH)

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A NOVEL APPROACH TO READING

by
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Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was before and never will be again. And what do we teach our children in school? We teach them that 2+2 are 4, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the world, there is no other child exactly like you. In the millions of years that have passed, there has never been a child like you. And look at your body--what a wonder it is! You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must cherish one another. You must work--we must all work--to make this world worthy of its children.

Pablo Casals

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PHILOSOPHY

We began seeing a need for a reading program broader than that of the basal reader. We remembered the excitement when we learned the joy of living vicariously through literature---the thrill of discovering there wasn't always one right answer to a comprehension question, that people had some of the same questions we had about a work, and that it was okay to ask questions, the excitement of emerging as a creative reader, of producing an original thought, realizing that nothing is impossible and that being different is not bad.

All children should have the opportunity to wonder. Children thrusted into a world in pure academia, a world of facts, figures, and reason but without wonder, will possibly fail to grasp the human qualities of compassion, charity, and empathy which we feel are the links that bind all people together. A good piece of literature is not only one-way communication; it is a catalyst to facilitate the reader's own source of thought that is developing. We feel children need to be offered books with a variety of levels of meaning. We feel that through reading fine literature, children can set high goals. They can initiate and enhance dreams.

We feel our job as educators is to help children live life more deeply through the vitality of a love of books of quality. We should provide an alternative to the counterfeit, superficial people of the TV or computer world. Each child is original and an individual. They should have the opportunity to discover and interact with great minds of the past and present. We feel they can enter these worlds through literature.

APPLICATION

In our school, we are faced with a rather unique situation in that at the intermediate level, we may have only a handful of readers below grade level. This luxury gave us the opportunity to develop units at the intermediate grades (4-6) using children's novels. This is not a case where all teachers teach primarily from novels, but rather, one in which teachers do whatever they are comfortable with. We have classrooms where one novel is taught per year, to those where novels form the entire reading program. We feel that each child, during his or her intermediate years, will read and study a minimum of three novels.

These novel presentations are guided experiences much the same as developmental reading lessons in most basal series. Specifically, we build background for each chapter, introduce the new vocabulary (only those words they cannot decode using context), give a reason for reading, and assign the chapter to be read silently. Following silent reading, we discuss the chapter orally, or assign the students higher level comprehension questions to be answered on paper. Most often, these questions are designed using Bloom's Taxonomy, and are of an inferential rather than literal level of interpretation.

One of the concerns often expressed by teachers is "When do we address the skills incorporated in the basal materials?" As we looked at the basal skills strand, we found that many of the skills were language/usage skills (grammar, sentence structure, research skills, etc.). We feel that these skills can be instructed during the language period and do not have to consume valuable "reading" time. The Reading skill work, such as vocabulary development and decoding skills, appreciation of style, technique and plot development can be addressed very nicely with novels.

Given the motivation of a particular group, the possibilities are endless for interdisciplinary activities. Many research activities can be incorporated in most of the novels, such as tracing the track of a voyage, or studying the locale of a particular story. The Witch of Blackbird Pond or My Brother Sam is Dead go quite well with fifth grade studies of colonial America. The 21 Balloons is used quite nicely in conjunction with science units on air, measurement and motion. The Phantom Tollbooth and The Pushcart War are classics in language usage and appreciation of ethnic differences.

An exciting activity that we have started recently with our top readers is having them compose comprehension questions for novels using Bloom's. They read a novel at or below their independent reading level, and compose six to ten good comprehension questions per chapter. We provided them with a chart listing Bloom's verbs to assist with their work. These questions have proven to be a resource for teachers later using those novels.

This last idea helps to overcome one of the negatives of novel instruction--preparation time. If a person plans to teach a novel, there is the time commitment to read it, study the vocabulary, and compose comprehension questions. This is not a simple undertaking, as those of you who have done it well know. It is also sad to say that commercially-produced programs are usually inadequate, or do not apply to your particular situations (questions usually too hard or too easy).

Novels have become an integral part of our students' Reading program. It is exciting to have children ask for more books by Katherine Paterson after reading Bridge To Terebithia, or by Robert C. O'Brien after reading Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH (not the Hollywood version!). When we mention Caldecott or Newberry awards, quite often, the students can name two or three books that won each award. Books hold a place of honor in our school, library usage is up, and in this electronics age, students at Homestead School are tuned in to literature.

THE 21 BALLOONS

William Pene duBois

Introduction (pp. 3-9): Read aloud, or have a student read aloud and discuss conveyance. Discuss balloon travel.

Chapter I (pp. 9-18): "Professor Sherman's Incredible Loyalty"

1. What was Professor Sherman's voyage on August 15 supposed to accomplish? What did it actually accomplish? Why?
2. Why did Professor Sherman not share his story with his rescuers?
3. Why were the ship's captain, doctor and cook hurt and disappointed by the Professor's decision as to who to tell his story to?
4. Find the approximate location of the ship. See page 12. (Use large world map.)
5. Evaluate Captain Simon's actions on selling his log and the Professor's location to the newspapers.
6. Describe the communications between the San Francisco Tribune and the New York Tribune over Professor Sherman.
7. What was the mayor's approach?
8. How was the President's reply different from the others so far when the Professor said "No."? Why?
9. Explain the people's interest in Professor Sherman's adventures.

Chapter II (pp. 19-31): A Hero's Welcome is Prepared"

1. Why didn't Professor Sherman fly to San Francisco from New York?
2. Illustrate what Corinthian columns would look like. (p. 19)
3. Describe with some detail San Francisco's reaction to Professor Sherman's homecoming.
4. Explain how the boy with the balloons' brother almost came into disaster.
5. Describe the funniest incident to occur from the Mayor's plan. Why did it occur?
6. The Directors of the Tomes Aeronautical Studios were involved in some brainstorming after discovering they were left out of the parade planning. Describe their original idea, and then the final product. Also discuss why the idea was changed.
7. How did a young boy spark interest in the Professor's homecoming when it was lagging.
8. If you have lived in San Francisco at this time, would you have chosen to attend the homecoming celebration and parade? Why or why not?

Chapter III (pp. 35-45): "Description of the Globe"

1. Describe in general terms the Professor's return. What is your reaction to this?
2. Why did the applause bother the Professor?
3. How did the Professor's trip not turn out as he had planned? How do you suppose he felt about this?

4. Why do you suppose he wanted to be alone?
5. How was the Professor's balloon unique?
6. Why didn't the Professor want to use sand as ballast?
7. Describe some of the ideas the Professor had for saving weight and having all the supplies he needed.
8. Why weren't people more interested when he left San Francisco?

Chapter IV (pp. 47-60): "The Unwelcome Passenger"

1. It seems as if there are many superstitions about luckiness. For example, the Professor was concerned about feeding the gulls, as it was considered by mariners to be good luck. Describe another superstition that you know of and your theory as how it came to be.
2. Describe the Professor's garbage problem and how he solved it and another problem at the same time.
3. Describe in chronological order the events of Day 7 of the voyage.
4. Obviously, this story is fiction and fantasy. In a short essay, discuss what events you feel could be realistic in the story and those which are totally unrealistic and why.
5. Find out some facts and information about Krakatoa. Describe where you looked and what you found out in a couple of paragraphs.

Chapter V (pp. 61-75): "A New Citizen of Krakatoa"

1. What was so surprising about the man who greeted the Professor?
2. What had the rest of the world felt about Krakatoa?
3. What did the man say as to the Professor's future? Why?
4. What was so unusual and funny about their trip through the Jungle?
5. What was different about the center of the island? Why?
6. When they came close to the mountain, Mr. F did some explaining to the Professor. About what, and why?
7. Describe the mountain's rumblings and the Professor's reaction.
8. What was unusual about the room they went into?
9. Have you any ideas about why they wanted their island to remain unknown? Describe them.
10. How was the Professor destined to land on the island?
11. Describe the motivation for keeping the diamonds a secret and how they keep themselves supplied.
12. Discuss people's honesty and wealth and how the two sometimes cause problems.

Chapter VI (pp. 76-93): "The Gourmet Government"

1. Explain what you think the motto "Non Nova, Sed Nove"--"Not New Things, but New Ways" means.
2. How would you distinguish the differences between the foundation on your home and that of those on Krakatoa?
3. Much of Mr. F's house was completed in the French style of architecture. Collect some data and write a short essay explaining more facts that make French architecture unique.

4. How was Mr. M lucky in a number of ways?
5. What two things did each family have to have in order to be selected to go to Krakatoa? Why?
6. Explain why the first year on the island was "horrible".
7. How did the diamonds get evened out finally?
8. Explain the unusual aspects of the Krakatoan Constitution.
9. What do the people's names stand for?
10. How do the Krakatoans make sure their secret will be kept?
11. What was Professor Sherman's place going to be on the island?
12. React to this place--do you think it could really work this way? Why or why not?

Chapter VII (pp. 95-111): "The Moroccan House of Marvels"

1. Professor Sherman's question on Page 95 is a good one--since the people work only one day out of twenty, are they bored, or do they have something to keep them busy? Reread Mr. F's answer and analyze it. Discuss in a short essay why you think that idea (Mr. F's) is good or bad and why. Would it work in reality? What might be some problems with it?
2. Select one of the inventions in Mr. M's house that interests you and describe it. Tell why you chose it, and if you would like to have it at your house and why.
3. Seeing the Krakatoans' inventiveness in action in this chapter, become an inventor yourself. Illustrate and describe an invention that you would like to have at your house.
4. From what you know of Krakatoa so far, decide if you would have liked to have been a member of one of the twenty families. Tell why you feel the way you do.

Chapter VIII (11. 113-133): "Airy Go Round"

1. Why do you suppose Professor Sherman called the Intermission?
2. How had the Balloon Merry -go-Roung come to be?
3. Why didn't the Professor admit he was a teacher?
4. Describe why a Krakatoan amusement park would be different from a normal amusement park.
5. Describe the Balloon Merry-go-Round as Professor Sherman first saw it.
6. Professor Sherman accepted with some trepidation. What did he mean?
7. How would you say the organization of the Krakatoan children was different than if we tried a similar project with 40 children from our trail?
8. Describe the trip up the pole and to its conclusion. How would you have liked it? How did the Professor like it?
9. How was the Professor liking Krakatoa? How does it compare with his life in San Francisco?

Chapter IX (pp. 135-153): "Concerning the Giant Balloon Life Raft"

1. What was the Professor's and the children's reaction to the Day C menu?
2. Describe what was unique about swimming off of Krakatoa.

3. Using your outline map, trace the Professor's voyage from San Francisco to Krakatoa as he described it.
4. Why aren't the Krakatoans worried about the Balloon Merry-go-Round being seen from Java or Summatra? Do you feel their conclusions are valid? Why or why not?
5. How do you think you would feel living so close to the volcano, especially after what happened to them in 1877? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Look at Mr. F's reasoning for staying on pages 140-142. Why do you think they stay?
7. Describe their invention to save their lives. Does it sound reasonable or unreasonable? Give reasons for your answers.
8. How would you feel in Professor Sherman's place knowing you didn't have a parachute and everyone else did?

Chapter X (pp.154-1): "What Goes Up Must Come Down"

1. Can you explain why Mr. F wanted to know about San Francisco?
2. How did Professor Sherman almost let on he was a teacher?
3. How did the Professor feel about his presentation for the Krakatoans?
4. Was the people's reaction to the volcano as you expected? Why or why not?
5. What seemed out of character for the Krakatoans on the platform? Why?
6. How did the explosion and destruction of Krakatoa affect them?
7. What provisions did they make for Professor Sherman? If you had been a Krakatoan, how would you have felt about this?
8. Describe the family parachutes. What is unique about them?
9. What made the Professor's final landing so difficult?
10. What do you think of the Professor's plan for the next year? Would you have done the same?

SUGGESTED READABILITY

Title	Author	Level
Abel's Island	William Steig	6.0
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The	Mark Twain	5.9
Alice in Wonderland	Lewis Carroll	5.0
Black Pearl, The	Scott O'Dell	
Black Stallion, The	Walter Farley	4.0
Book of Three, The	Lloyd Alexander	5.5
Boy Who Could Make Himself Disappear, The	Kin Platt	5.0
Bridge to Terebithia, A	Katherine Paterson	4.0
Call of the Wild, The	Jack London	6.0
Danny Champion of the World	Roald Dahl	6.0
Day No Pigs Would Die, A	Robert Newton Peck	5.0
Door in the Wall, The	Marguerite DeAngeli	6.0
Endless Steppe, The	Esther Hautzig	6.0
Enormous Egg, The	Oliver Butterworth	5.7
Fellowship of the Ring	J.R.R. Tolkien	10.0
From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler	E.L. Konigsburg	5.6
Great Gilly Hopkins, The	Katherine Patterson	5.0
Gulliver's Stories	Dolch, Dolch, Jackson	4.0
High King, The	Lloyd Alexander	8.1
Island of the Blue Dolphins	Scott O'Dell	5.5
Jacob I Have Loved	Katherine Paterson	
Just a Dog	Helen Griffiths	5.0
King's Fifth, The	Scott O'Dell	5.4
Liza	Elisabeth Lansing	
Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH	Robert O'Brien	6.0
My Side of the Mountain	Jean George	6.0
Old Yeller	Fred Gipson	7.0
Phantom Tollbooth, The	Norton Juster	5.0
Pushcart War, The	Jean Merrill	6.7
Return of the King	J.R.R. Tolkien	10.0
Sing Down the Moon	Scott O'Dell	5.3
Summer of the Swans, The	Betsy Byars	6.0
Taran Wanderer	Lloyd Alexander	6.6
Thanksgiving Treasure, The	Gail Rock	
21 Balloons, The	William Pene duBois	7.6
Two Towers, The	J.R.R. Tolkien	10.0
White Mountains, The	John Christopher	5.0
Witch of Blackbird Pond, The	Elizabeth George Speare	6.1
Words By Heart	Onida Sebestyen	6.0
Wrinkle in Time, A	Madeleine L'Engle	5.8
Z for Zachariah	Robert C. O'Brien	9.0